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SUBJECT: THE SIMMER BEFORE THE BOIL? SPECIAL ADVISOR
KRAJESKI DISCUSSES KRG-GOI RELATIONS WITH KURDISH LEADERS,
PART II

REF: BAGHDAD 3776

Classified By: Classified by Deputy Political Counselor John Fox for Reasons 1.4 (a) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an RRT Erbil reporting cable.

SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) Senior Advisor (S/A) for Northern Iraq Thomas Krajieski engaged Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and non-KRG interlocutors on KRG relations with the Government of Iraq (GOI), upcoming provincial elections, article 140, and the status of Kirkuk and other disputed territories. Though expressing their commitment to observing the Iraqi Constitution and to participating in provincial and national elections, KRG officials do not believe that the GOI treats them as equal partners. They stressed the necessity for the GOI to keep promises made to the KRG, their frustration with delays on article 140 implementation, and their pessimism about future KRG-GOI relations.

[1](#)3. (U) S/A Krajieski visited Erbil and Sulaymaniyah on November 25-26. He met with KRG Intelligence Chief Masr'ur Barzani, PUK Politburo Deputy Secretary General Kosrat Rasul, former PUK member (now media entrepreneur) Nawshirwan Mustafa, and PUK Politburo Director Mullah Bakhtiar. This is the second of two cables detailing S/A Krajieski's discussions. END SUMMARY.

KRG INFLUENCE ON IRAQI PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS

[1](#)4. (C) Meeting with Masr'ur Barzani, S/A Krajieski requested that the KRG work with all levels of security in Ninewa and Salah Ad Din (SaD) provincial governments to prevent election-related violence or intimidation, and to maximize participation in the elections. Barzani responded that the KRG has an interest in "credible, free and clean" provincial elections. He mentioned Ninewa especially because of the large Kurdish population there. Barzani welcomed increased Sunni Arab participation in the elections, but observed that the Sunni Arab Hedba party, which he alleged is supported by ex-Ba'athists such as Izzat Al Doori and former Kurdish mercenaries, is becoming more involved in elections preparations in Ninewa. He only grudgingly admitted that former members of the Ba'ath party had a right to participate and vote in the upcoming elections. He stated that "for elections all we can do is to provide a safe environment."

[1](#)5. (C) With security throughout Iraq much improved, Rasul claimed that the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) is not as popular now, and predicted that tribal and secular parties will perform best in provincial elections in Anbar, Ninewa, SaD, and Diyala. He believes that the Kurdish Alliance will win one or two seats in SaD, but more in Diyala. He thought that

neither VP Tariq Al Hashimi and Council of Representatives (COR) Speaker Mahmud Mashhadani nor the lists they lead will do well in provincial or national elections.

¶16. (C) Mustafa believes that Iraqis will embrace provincial elections if the GOI provides sufficient security. Musing on parliamentary politicking after the next national elections, he predicted that the Shi'a bloc will keep the Premiership, the Kurdish bloc will get the COR speaker position, and the Sunni Arabs would take the Presidency. He maintains that in Iraq there are no national parties--people vote for their ethnic or religious or local identities while politicians fight about privileges.

GOI DILUTION OF KURDISH FORCES IN THE IRAQI ARMY (IA)

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¶17. (C) Barzani charged that the GOI is decreasing the percentage of officers in formerly predominantly Kurdish Iraqi Army (IA) divisions, particularly in provinces with disputed territories. Noting that PM Maliki has still not kept his promise to create two completely Kurdish divisions, Barzani believes that Maliki intends to marginalize KRG participation in national decision-making. He also affirmed that the KRG will "never give up Peshmerga" troops. For his part, Rasul opined that "all ethnic groups should be included in the army. But we do not want the IA to be as powerful as it was in Saddam's era."

ARTICLE 140 AND KIRKUK

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¶18. (C) Barzani identified what he saw as a disturbing GOI policy of "the best defense is offense." He alleged that throughout the provinces that are considered disputed, Baghdad deliberately provokes the KRG, and when the KRG responds "it appears as though Baghdad is simply defending itself." Barzani rejected any accusations of Kurdish expansionism, and expressed frustration with what he perceived to be the GOI's disrespect of the rights of the autonomous KRG. In Kirkuk, he noted that the KRG "still" does not have full responsibility for security, implying that that was the reason for continued violence there. He pointed out that article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution still has not been implemented, and blamed the delay on the GOI.

¶19. (C) Both Kosrat Rasul and Nawshirwan Mustafa acknowledged it would be nearly impossible for any KRG official or party member to publicly support a compromise on control of Kirkuk, but both also indicated potential third ways. Mustafa suggested that executive positions (Governor, provincial council chair, etc.) in provincial government could rotate annually among the various Kirkuki communities. Rasul supported granting the KRG administrative responsibility for Kirkuk in exchange for GOI control over the province's oil reserves and revenues. Rasul also suggested that the UN administer Kirkuk for three years. He did not have much faith in the Article 23 committee, believing that if Kirkuk is governed by committee, Iran and Syria will bribe committee members.

¶10. (C) Bakhtiar believes there will be a problem with article 140 and Kirkuk, but the Kurds will not cause it. Article 140, he said, was a compromise for Kurds, who felt compelled to accept it. He added that the Kurds have resisted reacting to GOI provocations. He noted also that the Kurds had resisted pressing forward on elections in Kirkuk, saying "we did not insist on elections in Kirkuk this year because we wanted to keep the conversation open. But had we conducted elections, it was clear that we would have had the upper hand. It is rare that a group sacrifices

victory."

FORECASTS FOR THE FUTURE

¶11. (C) Like Bakhtiar, Barzani feels that the KRG is due gratitude rather than blame for its restraint in not responding forcefully to recent perceived GOI provocations in the disputed territories. He welcomed the returning strength and effectiveness of the GOI "but not at the expense of Kurdish rights." He expressed a specific interpretation of the Iraqi Constitution, which he thinks is "the best document" to refer to for disagreements and which he thinks "lays down the roadmap for how the region will work with the GOI." Barzani suggested that there may be a basic misunderstanding in how each group views Iraq and the implications of the Constitution. According to him, the KRG "does not support a strong, centralized government in Baghdad." He affirmed that if what he called the "region-oriented Constitution is disregarded, we have no loyalty to this country." He claimed that Iraq has always been problematic because it is a "fabricated ideal ... We will never reach agreement unless the realities are seen and agreed to."

¶12. Bakhtiar and Rasul also affirmed their reliance on the Constitution in resolving KRG-GOI disagreements. Like Barzani, however, Bakhtiar sounded a dark note when looking to the future. He saw the Constitution as maintaining a delicate balance among the powers within Iraq, but "could not Qdelicate balance among the powers within Iraq, but "could not say" himself whether this equilibrium could be maintained. Referring to Maliki's recent statements that the central government should have greater power, Bakhtiar worried that some in the GOI and the CoR are not genuinely democratic and do not want to observe the Constitution.
CROCKER